1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

XIV

DANCE AND DRAMA

796 535 BEFORE describing the dance and drama in detail it may be as well to set down a brief programme of events, i.e. the sequent stages of the festival. We may assume that the tabu is on the village and that it will remain until the occasion of the feast. If this feast is to be a considerable one, the [345] first step will be the construction of an *arijo*, i.e. a men's house, which will be frequented by the men alone, and used for singing. This may be built a month or so before the festival, and from time to time the old-fashioned dancing (*kuru*) will take place in the open space before the *arijo*.

As the time for the festival approaches, the dancers practise the dance specially arranged for the occasion. There may be an enclosure, *java bamboru*, in or on the outskirts of the village, where they may rehearse in private. (Note that this *java bamboru* may be in the village where the feast and dance are to take place, or in another village. The latter is [514] frequently the case because the dance is commonly performed by *visitors* who have previously undertaken to present it. They therefore rehearse in their own village, and stage the finished performance in the village where the festival is taking place.)

The preparations for the feast are now finalized, food being brought in from the gardens, and platforms or booths erected to stack the provisions or provide shelter for the guests. When everything is in readiness there is a formal semi-public rehearsal of the dance called *pamoni kiari*, or 'Demonstration before the Women'. This takes place on the afternoon before the festival, and is not witnessed by any save the villagers who are making the dance.

The remaining stages may be summarized as follows:

(i) During the night the stage fixtures are set up in the village, and any movable stage paraphernalia placed ready in the bush.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

(ii) The morning of the festival sees all the guests assembled. The performers are decorating themselves in the bush.

(iii) The ballet makes its appearance at some moment during the afternoon.

(iv) After dancing some ten minutes or more the ballet goes off and brings back the movable stage properties.

(v) While they resume the dance the actors, *buivi* and *binei*, make their entry and proceed with the play. This being concluded, they dance off and disappear in the bush.

(vi) The ballet proceeds for a while with the main dance, and then breaks off into a series of minor 'nature' dances.

The performance of the dance and drama may be said to end here. The paraphernalia of the play, however, are brought together, and finally disposed of in a ceremonial manner, but this may be a matter of months afterwards. I shall now proceed to deal with the Orokaiva dance in detail, giving an account—confessedly slight—of its technique.

The Dance

The general name for 'dance' is *java* (Binandele *ya*). As far as I have ascertained there are five main kinds practised by the Orokaiva, viz. (1) *Kuru*, (2) *Paruka*, (3) *Arijo* or *Saunda*, (4) *Puga*, and (5) *Si*. Only the first two are accompanied by song, and only the last three are accompanied by the drama.[1] The first, *kuru*, is without any definite formation save that of a group of men and boys clustered about several drummers. They dance slowly in one direction and then back over the same ground, singing meanwhile. Their movements are quite unpretentious, and might be described as rhythmical shuffling. In all the other dances the performers are in pairs one behind the other, forming double file. Each kind has its appropriate drums and rhythm, the drums being carried by the dancers themselves.

[1] The drama is not an invariable accompaniment of *Arijo*, for I have seen a performance of this dance without it. I cannot speak with certainty of *Puga* or *Si*, though I am given to understand that they are always associated with a dramatic performance.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

The rites—they hardly deserve such a name—are of an exceedingly sociable character, consisting typically of a singing in concert, to the accompaniment of drums, and of feasting with certain new forms of etiquette, the whole festive ceremony being known as *Kasamba*. The songs—like so many native songs, unintelligible alike to the listener and the singers—would often appear to be, in their origin, exhortations or hymns of praise to the taro. Certain sects perform distinctive dances, but, except in a few instances, the dance has not been highly elaborated, and remains a minor feature of the cult. Perhaps as an unintentional substitute, the innumerable followers of the movement indulged in various kinds of foolish antics, with reeling, staggering, and a violent shaking of the head and limbs known as *jipari*. There was no attempt to control these actions—rather the contrary—and they commonly ended in mild contortions and paroxysms. Such uncontrolled bodily movements do not belong to the Taro cult alone, but have been a common and unpleasant feature of many of the new religious movements enumerated above.

While practically every one has been a willing convert to the Taro cult in so far as it meant participation in the song and feast, and while perhaps the majority have given way at some time or other to the pleasant abandonment of the *jipari*, there is a wide class of Taro *experts* or special exponents of the cult. It is impossible to set a definite limit to this class. There are some who are recognized as leaders and who are very strongly 'possessed', and others who are little more than laymen. However, it is possible to include them all under the name of *ba-emba*, which means literally 'Taro man'. Such men, who, like the *Baigona* men, might be called priests of the cult, officiate and lead in the ceremonial feasting; they perform certain duties in the taro gardens; they make a special practice of *jipari* and similar contortions; and they subject themselves to certain taboos. The theory of their conduct is that of possession by a spirit, either of the taro itself or of the dead.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

A scene witnessed in the Aiga village of Korisata is typical enough, and will illustrate the way in which the Taro cult advances. A party of visitors had arrived from the lower Kumusi, which is not more than a good day's journey from Korisata. They were of another tribe—Binandele—and the purpose of their visit was principally that of reunion with their Taro friends and propaganda for the cause. They were led by an old man Tevara, a person of some distinction and a doyen of the cult in these parts, and by a village constable named Kove, an unusually volatile and excitable character and well known to the Government for his energy.

It has been pointed out that the Taro cult is divided into a number of sects. The nature of these will be fully treated later on: it is enough at present to say that Tevara was of the *Kaiva* and Kove of the *Kivere* sect, both these words being the names of varieties of the actual taro plant. In Korisata there was already established a branch of the *Kaiva* sect under one Siavije, which though bearing the same name differed in a good many points from the *Kaiva* of the visitors, owing no doubt to a long previous divergence. Lastly there were the new converts to *Diroga*, led by my interpreter Ihipa. Thus there were four parties of Taro men in the village at one time, all united by the good fellowship which is one of the best characteristics of the movement, but all anxious to show themselves off to advantage before the others.

In the first day's demonstration Kove the village policeman was almost alone and quite overshadowed, especially by the young and enthusiastic recruits of *Diroga*. He said he would show them, however, and that night went on to a village a mile or so distant where his own *Kivere* sect was strongly represented. On the morrow, he declared, there would be a 'race', i.e. a competition, to see who danced longer and better, and who were the more numerous.

At about noon next day Kove's party, heavily rein-

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

forced, made its appearance to the sound of drums and conches and their own lusty voices, and took up their stand at one end of the village. The accredited *Kivere* men formed the front rank; behind them were the drummers and singers, mere laymen; and behind these again a number of girls made use of the opportunity for displaying their charms in a dance.

The *Kivere* men carry spears. Gripping them tightly they reel, shudder, and posture, the spear struck into the ground seeming to act as some support, while their faces assume expressions of great agony, which, one sincerely hopes, are largely counterfeit. For the most part they remain stationary, though occasionally an individual will break away, and brandishing his spear, and swerving in and out among spectators and coco-nut palms, perform a frantic, staggering circle back to his place in the rank.

While these demonstrations of the power of the spirit are continuing, the arrival of the *Diroga* men is awaited from the other end of the village. This rival party has been preparing its paint and feathers and characteristic decoration of flowers or leaves, and has been practising assiduously the steps of the *Diroga* dance. Now, headed by two old adepts (both interpreters of mine who hail from the district where *Diroga* is in vogue), the new converts advance in open formation toward the waiting *Kivere* men. Their movements are full of grace: they progress at once rapidly and slowly, bounding forward a few yards and then retreating almost as far again. There are definite steps to be performed but no complicated movements; each dancer moves individually, dodging, gliding, or leaping; there is no voice heard save an occasional half-stifled ejaculation, a sort of whimper which the *Diroga* men affect; but every movement is accompanied by a thrust or jab of the slender spear, and the hollow rattles which are attached to it maintain a queer accompaniment. Resembling most a force in attack, the *Diroga* party was much more mobile than the usually solid phalanx of the *Kivere* men; their

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

conduct had much more of art in it, and fewer real excesses. Considering that they were mostly novices their performance certainly did them credit. Foremost among them, and evidently very conscious of his own address, was my newly converted cook-boy, who danced far better than he cooked.

While these two parties were in a manner dancing one another down, the *Kaiva* men, though less strongly represented, were not idle. Old Tevara, head of the faction from the Kumusi, carried a magnificent spear, very weighty, and beautifully polished and feathered. This he manipulated as if in a pole dance, and performed graceful little pirouettes with his feet, all of which, to one's surprise, cost him no loss of dignity, although he was an elderly man and a very large one. Circling in and out among the bystanders he would pause from time to time to hold his spear horizontally above their heads, in a manner reminiscent of benediction. Prominent among his followers was his wife, whose movements had more velocity if less elegance, and who continually flicked the spectators with a bunch of the crimson-leafed taro medicine, *Tumeni*.

The local faction of *Kaiva* men had their main representative in Siavije, who, trotting aimlessly hither and thither between the several parties of dancers, and repeating something over and over to himself, acted a part all his own which, it is to be feared, made no great impression on the bystanders.

After the dances, antics, or paroxysms of the several sects had continued for some time, there followed a general pause in which the Korisata people, forming themselves into single file, paraded past the visitors, each man shaking the hand of every visitor in turn as he passed. Then one of the leaders of the *Diroga* delivered a harangue before Kove's party of *Kivere* men. Prancing back and forth before them and menacing them with his spear, after the manner of an Orokaiva who wishes to make his voice heard, he explained the methods of *Diroga*, and bade them

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

variants of the cult which will be later described in section 10. The following pages will give an account of the various points of Taro ritual which have been passed on from one exponent of the cult to another, and which have been from time to time republished, so to speak, by the dreamer.

7. *Ritual and Practice*

The singing, drum-beating, and feasting—no very exacting ceremonies—which constitute the chief ritual of the Taro cult, are together known as *kasamba*. The word is one of those made popular by the new cult, and is freely used in outlying parts of the Division by people who are as ignorant of its real meaning and derivation as I am myself.[1] At a large *kasamba* the scene is little different from that of the ordinary Orokaiva feast, except for a new style of singing, a certain exaggerated etiquette in the setting forth of the feast, and the excesses of those who lose control of themselves.

Hospitality seems always to have been a cardinal virtue with the Orokaiva, as indeed with most natives. A village takes a just pride and pleasure in feasting its neighbours, and long before the day of the forgathering there have been platforms conspicuously placed for the accumulation of the victuals. The taro and other garden products are gathered with a touch of ceremony which was probably absent in pre-Taro days. Led by the principal Taro man, the whole village files out to the gardens and returns with a load of tremendous tubers, while the drummers who accompany the party thump their drums with an odd mixture of solemnity and jubilation. The guests, when they arrive, are hailed clamorously with shouts of '*Oroda, oroda!*' which is the distinctive cry of the Taro men; and the youths of the village will rush hither and thither, brandishing their weapons, and tearing down banana leaves or coco-nut

[1] One informant said that *kasamba* meant originally the 'junk' of taro, i.e. the cooked fragment of appropriate size. It is a point of Taro etiquette to cut up the taro into somewhat smaller junks than used to be the fashion.

2: Williams E.G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

X-794 branches for their guests to sit on. Meanwhile the guests
●796 file into the village, headed by some old warrior with his
574 stone club upon his shoulder, and if they are well-bred Orokaiva all this stormy welcome will not provoke so much as a flicker of response in their faces. They sit down abruptly, forming a shallow arc, and once seated seem to relax their gravity as their hosts ply them with betel-nut.

[346] Possibly a special platform or house, a sort of band-stand, has been erected for the occasion. This is called *ba oro*, i.e. 'Taro men's house', and is meant for the somewhat exclusive use of the accredited Taro men during the day, and for the chorus which is to continue
X-794 throughout the night. The singers will crowd about a
796 fire in the centre of the floor; if the night be cold, they
574 will sit more comfortably in the ascending heat of fires
533 on the ground beneath. One man after another leads, singing a stave or two with the truly musical voice of the Orokaiva, and as, or almost before, he finishes, the whole chorus bursts forth with the refrain. The drums beat the distinctive Taro rhythm, viz. two equal beats followed by a pause equivalent to one of them, or time of three with the third beat missed. This rhythm, I believe, is used throughout the whole Division by the Taro singers, and, as far as I know, exclusively. It is the same rhythm as that of the dance *baruga*, practised long previous to the advent of Taro, save that it is considerably slower. According to one informant, the Taro measure had been specified, like other details of the cult, in a dream. The
[534] drums are tuned with no little care, the lizard skin being tautened with lumps of beeswax until the correct tone is obtained. Shell trumpets are blown by one or two boys, whose enthusiasm is not unequal to the immense staying power which this instrument demands; but too often the shell trumpet, which admits of no tuning, shatters the harmony of the concert, and one can understand why a distracted missionary lit his Primus stove and placed it by his reading-lamp so that its roar might drown the discords of the *kasamba*.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

The singing is called sometimes *kasamba*, sometimes *tinogu*: the second word, like the first, is one of the new Taro vocabulary, presumably belonging to the Binandele dialect, but used nowadays by Taro men among the Aiga, for instance, in preference to their own word *peungu*. As so often with native songs, the meaning is very obscure, even to the singers; and sometimes the theme, when it is discovered, appears somewhat beside the mark. Mr. Elder writes, regarding the Taro songs, 'some of them had little or nothing to do with taro. One for instance ran, "I'm a duck, I'm a duck, a jamb in the river, I'm a duck"'. And he not ineptly adds, 'I fancy the Taro worshipper who composed that song must secretly have been an unbeliever, and a bit of a humorist'. But very commonly the song consists of a series of apostrophes to the taro, a kind of salutation or hailing of it by name, with the cry of welcome, '*Oroda!*' which is a countersign of the cult. Thus one may hear, '*Oroda Kaiva, oroda Porove, Ovivi!*' &c., in endless musical repetition; or '*Ba de aja borejo*', 'Mother taro increase', and similar phrases, little canticles in which praise, exhortation, and prayer are combined. Very often it is futile to search too deeply for a meaning, because the words of the song have been learned by rote, and so confused in the course of transmission that they have become little better than gibberish. But whatever their meaning or lack of it, the songs are understood to contribute in some way to the growth of the taro; and some informants have declared that the Taro spirits heard them and responded.

As the Taro men have adopted a new name for the feast—*kasamba* instead of the old-fashioned *pona*—so they have introduced certain new formalities into the conduct of the feast. Taro must be cut up into small lumps; when cooked it must be ranged in a row of boat-shaped wooden dishes *too*, or the large platters made of canoe-board and called *betaia*; from the earthenware cooking-pot it must be transferred to the wooden dish by means of the

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

wooden fork or prong called *orai*; the really correct implement for peeling it before cooking is the black oyster-shell *yowa*. These very trivial points are accorded a good deal of importance, because, one and all, they have been impressed upon the Taro men by the spirits. One man, for instance, met his deceased *imbo*, or maternal uncle, in a dream, and was directed to make 'forks' from a certain kind of tree named *aima*. The forks, of which there was now a large supply in the village, were merely pointed pieces of wood, painted a dull red with clay; but they appeared to possess a sanctity out of all proportion to their appearance or utility. It would be impossible to tell how often forks, wooden dishes, platters, and so forth have been bestowed upon various dreamers by the spirits of the taro or the spirits of the dead.

It has been said already that dancing is not a marked feature of the Taro cult, although the Orokaiva have developed the dance to an admirable degree of perfection in their older ceremonies. Hitherto the devotees of the cult have been only too ready to find satisfaction in the absurd and sometimes hideous antics which are presently to be described. Some sects perform a stationary and others a sort of processional dance, both of which compare very unfavourably with the graceful and animated ballet which is the best product of Orokaiva art. There are, however, certain dances belonging to minor sects which seem to conform to the older style. Buninia himself originated such a dance, which has already been mentioned (p. 13). Yavevi, a disciple of the Manau cult, used to perform with his followers one of unusual complexity. The *Hohora*, or 'Rooster', men reproduced in a nature dance certain characteristic actions of the domestic cock, and theirs was one of the prettiest performances it has been my good fortune to see among Orokaiva dancers. But it is still true that the dance is, as yet, only a minor and ill-developed feature of the cult. The Taro men prefer as a rule to sit down as they sing. A *tinogu* or *kasamba* may be merely impromptu, when it is per-

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

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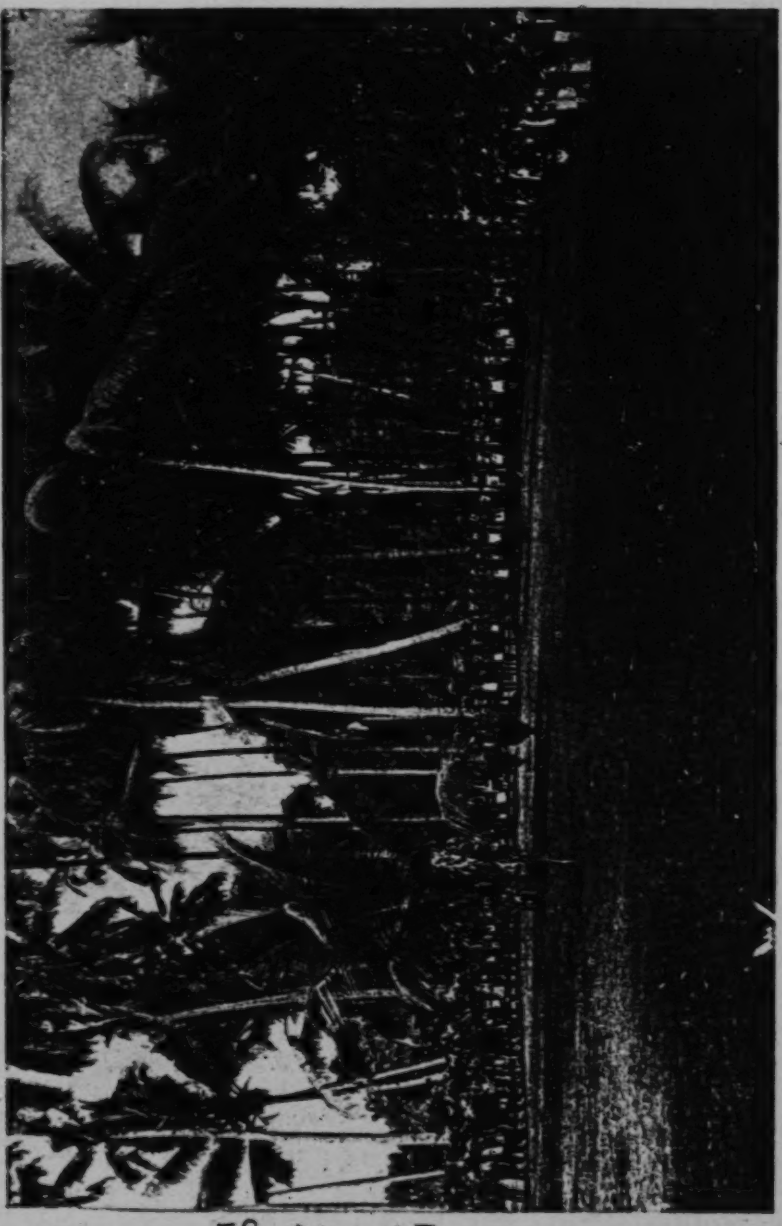

GUESTS AT A TARO FESTIVAL

[facing p. 40]

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

formed in one of the men's houses, *oro*, which is usually no more than a roofed platform. In the event of a large festival, a *ba oro*, or Taro house, will be constructed for the occasion, and after the feast this structure may remain as in some sort a temple of the Taro. It is frequented (not always exclusively) by the accredited Taro men and their professional visitors; it is the scene of recurring *kasamba*; and in some cases it is the place for food offerings to the spirits. A miniature platform will sometimes be found in the roof gable, with a dish of taro and dried fish, to which the spirits help themselves, betraying their presence, I am told, by faint 'sip sip' noises, like the chirping of the geckos which haunt all native houses. In the *ba oro* a Taro man will sometimes sit alone, belabouring his drum and shaking his rattled spear. This, for reasons which he probably cannot explain, will please the spirits and induce them to prosper the taro.

Besides the very congenial duties of singing and eating, the Taro man has certain more directly useful tasks. These consist especially in the use of his medicines. *Ba sivo*, or magical fertilizers for the taro plant, were known long before the present cult came into being. One can often see in them a kind of logic, that of homoeopathic magic. For instance, there is a certain plant named *Iori babiva* which bears a striking resemblance to the taro, but differs from it in being much larger and rankér. These qualities are just what the gardener requires in his vegetables, so he drops a fragment of *Iori babiva* leaf in the hole before he drops in the taro shoot. This is merely an example: there are medicines without number for taro, sugar-cane, yams, and all the other products of the garden. The Taro men, being in a manner specialists, savants, and horticultural as well as spiritual leaders, make great play with this means of advancing the crops. The pharmacopoeia is an extensive one, and each Taro man will name half a dozen well-known *ba sivo*—common property of all who follow the cult—and probably, if you engage to keep his secret, one or two private medicines

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

Orokaiva dance, with its characteristic mime or drama, may justly be called an admirable work of art. The northern native is naturally musical, fond of colour and display, and built for graceful and powerful movement. These gifts he has developed into a somewhat rugged but nevertheless charming and even impressive art.

It cannot, I fear, be claimed that the Taro cult has done anything to improve or augment this existent art. The chorus singing—always no doubt very crude—has evidently received an impetus, and appears to have taken on a new form, with the special feature of a distinctive rhythm (p. 38). A few more or less meritorious dances have been devised by different sects or variant cults. But in the main the activities of the Taro men have far more of enthusiasm than of artistic form about them. Yet, since savages are very prone to express their emotions in rhythmic as well as lyrical form, it is to be hoped that the ill-controlled movements of the *jipari* may in time be replaced by others that are more formal and artistic. It would not be surprising if, when the *jipari* has completely died out of fashion, there should survive some regular dances which, while distinctive of the Taro cult, will conform more nearly to the older and eminently superior models.

In the meantime it is to be feared that the new cult has seriously set back these older ceremonial dances. The alleged decline of these in the Northern Division has been discussed in an interim report. Among several other causes it seems that the Taro cult is mainly responsible for this decline of the ceremonies, simply because it has for the time being overwhelmed them. I may be permitted to repeat an extract from the above-mentioned report. It is to be hoped that the effect spoken of will not be permanent.

> 'As far as my knowledge goes there is no antagonism among the Taro men toward the old-fashioned ceremonies. Certain of the Taro leaders about the Mambare have expressly denied that the old and the new are in any way incompatible; and in other parts one

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

may see commonly enough a mingling of them on one and the same occasion. Indeed it is too often that a ceremony which, through generations of practice has assumed a refined and artistic form, should be interrupted and distorted by the excesses of a few vulgar Taro men. Regrettable as this must be, it serves to indicate that the Taro cult does not condemn the old ceremonies. For had it taken this turn it could have made as clean a sweep of them as the Vailala Madness did in the Gulf Division.

'In spite, however, of this neutral attitude, the Taro cult is probably responsible to no small extent for the decline of the old ceremonial dances. In these times the villagers find much of the social excitement they require in the feasting, singing, and inferior dancing which are features of the Taro cult, and also (though less now than formerly) in the various physical convulsions and paroxysms with which its devotees are affected. Moreover, as constant feasting and entertaining are the cardinal points of Taro ethics, the surplus of food which might provide for a celebration in the old-time way is squandered, so to speak, on these minor entertainments.

'The constantly recurring "*Kasamba*"—the combined singing and feasting which is typical of the Taro cult—very easily supplants the older and more elaborate ceremonies for several reasons. First, it is a craze: every village is anxious to be in the fashion. Secondly, it is a craze easily indulged: a *Kasamba* requires no rehearsal and no preparation, but can be got up at almost a moment's notice. Thirdly, it is in a sense obligatory: in some places the spirit of the taro, in others the spirit of the dead (according to the doctrine which happens to obtain) demands these feasts, and the effect of them is made visible in the output of taro. The more *Kasamba* the more taro.

'It may well be that this modern movement, which of late years has so occupied the thoughts of the Orokaiva, is now slackening, and that the activities of the Taro men, already greatly modified, no longer entirely crowd out the older ceremonies; and there seems every likelihood that further modifications will permit a revival of these older practices, which from most points of view (certainly the artistic) are eminently superior.'

Having reviewed some of the effects—vague as they are—of this remarkable movement we may formulate in very general terms our own proper attitude toward it. That native life should be permitted to shape itself out rather than be completely remodelled according to European taste, is a doctrine more often preached than practised. We may, however, cling to the theoretical